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E. J. DEVINE, S. J.

John de Brébeuf

APOSTLE OF THE HURONS

*Cruelly tortured and put to death by the Iroquois savages
on Martyrs' Hill, Simcoe County, Ont., March 16, 1649*



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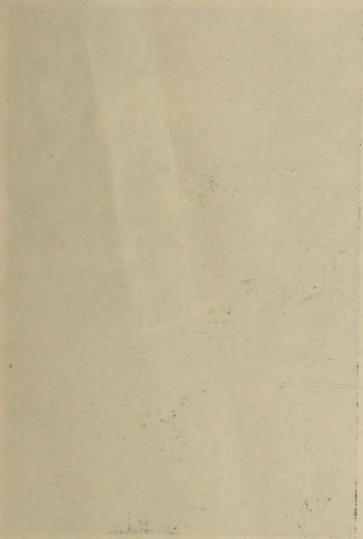
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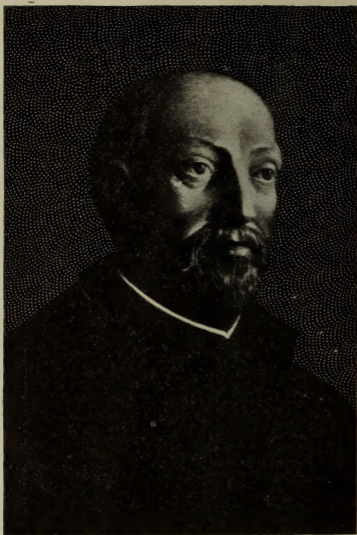
† PAUL, Arch. Marianopolitanus.

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JOHN DE BREECK

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JOHN DE BRÉBEUF, S. J.

(Portrait by Boyes)



John de Brébeuf

APOSTLE OF THE HURONS

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His birth and early years THE Brébeuf family was of Norman origin; it can be traced as far back as the middle of the eleventh century. William Duke of Normandy had a Brébeuf with him at the battle of Hastings in 1066. Another Brébeuf accompanied Saint Louis, two centuries later, in his crusade against the Turks. In 1251, Nicholas de Brébeuf is mentioned in the annals of this Norman family as one of the chief citizens of Bayeux. It was in the diocese of that name, at Condé-sur-Vire, that John de Brébeuf was born, March 25, 1593. We have no details regarding his early years, but the child undoubtedly received the training in piety and learning which was one of the traditions of his race. It would be hard to believe, at least, that religious influences had not molded the youth of one who was destined later to do great deeds for God in the forests of the New World, and who, when the supreme sacrifice was demanded, showed a heroism in torture and suffering almost unparalleled in the history of the Church.

Besides, the germ of vocation had already

developed in the soul of the future apostle of the Hurons; at the age of twenty-four John de Brébeuf entered the Jesuit novitiate at Rouen, November 8, 1617. In that home of peace and

**He enters the
Jesuit Order** piety the young man devoted two years to prayer and reflection, and to the cultivation of those little virtues which were to be the foundation stones of his future holiness. Secluded from the distractions of the world, he labored seriously to acquire self-knowledge and to exercise himself in the practice of humility, a virtue he pushed so far that he desired to abandon all aspirations to the priesthood to become a lay brother in the Order. But his superiors, assured that the humbler the novice the stronger the indications that he would one day give more glory to God in the priesthood, refused Brébeuf's request, and counselled him to accept whatever grade in the Society of Jesus obedience would decide.

At the end of his noviceship the young Jesuit was sent to teach grammar in the college in Rouen. There the religious kept pace with the professor; while Brébeuf taught the rules of grammar to his pupils he did not neglect to implant in their minds and hearts the principles of Christian virtue. With untiring devotedness he spent two years in this important work, but his zeal in the class-room exacted its price. His labors undermined his health and forced him to retire and seek absolute rest. However, a young religious who had been

taught to set a high value on the fleeting minutes could not stay idle. Brébeuf applied himself privately to the study of theology, and acquired sufficient knowledge for the duties of the sacred ministry. He was raised to the priesthood

**Raised to the
priesthood**

at Pontoise, at the beginning of Lent, 1622, and celebrated his first Mass, on the transferred feast of the Annunciation, April 4 of the same year. Years of waiting only intensifies one's consolations when the goal is reached, and the sentiments of the future victim of the Iroquois may be easily gauged the morning he called down from the Heaven, for the first time, the Spotless Victim and adored Him Who lay on the altar hidden under the sacramental veil. One grace followed another; after his ordination the health of the young Jesuit priest improved rapidly, and he was named bursar of the college in Rouen.

While the months were passing thus peacefully away in the city of Rouen, events of vast importance were happening in the little French colony beyond the Atlantic. Samuel de Champlain had founded Quebec; he had established the fur trade and had already visited many of the native tribes. This pious statesman stood aghast at the multitude of souls he witnessed lying in the darkness of infidelity and superstition, and he resolved to bring to them a knowledge of the Christian faith. Through his efforts the Recollects had crossed the ocean in 1615; a couple of them had even penetrated

to the shore of Georgian Bay; but the vastness of New France, its large number of savage tribes, and the conditions of life prevailing among them, forced the Recollect missionaries to admit that alone they could not stem the tide of paganism. They appealed in consequence to the Society of Jesus to share the field with them, but it was only in 1625 that their appeal was successful. Three Jesuit priests, Charles

He arrives in Lalemant, Ennemond Massé and
New France John de Brébeuf, were chosen
for the arduous missions of

New France. In years Brébeuf was the youngest of the three, but he was their equal in virtue. When the order was received to cross the Atlantic, he did not hesitate to sever the ties of blood and family affection, to abandon his homeland and consecrate himself to the salvation of the savages of the New World. Nature had well prepared him for this calling; notwithstanding his former years of illness, he was now in perfect health, and in possession of a herculean frame; he was in the flower of manhood—thirty-two years of age—a splendid type of manliness and strength. These physical qualities, so necessary in a foreign missionary, were crowned with a prudence and a maturity of judgment which made his advice on all matters valuable and eagerly sought for.

Such was John de Brébeuf, the missionary, who reached Quebec in the summer of 1625. His first impulse on landing was to proceed immediately to the Huron country to begin the study

of the language and prepare himself for his ministry; and he was about to start on the long and trying journey up the Ottawa when the news of the murder of the Recollect, Nicholas Viel, contrived by treacherous pagan Hurons on the route he would have to pass, made his superior take no risks; Father Charles Lalemant recalled him to Quebec to await a more favorable moment. "Their hearts failed them," wrote Douglas, "after having heard of the drowning of Viel on the Ottawa on his way down from Georgian Bay; but this can hardly be the motive," he adds, "for Father de Brébeuf's subsequent glorious career and martyrdom makes it impossible to suspect him of timidity".

A whole year elapsed before the opportunity of going presented itself again; meanwhile as a preparation for his future career among the Hurons, the young missionary decided to taste its trials and hardships nearer home. In order to inure himself more thoroughly to the ways of savage life, he spent the winter of 1625-1626 among the Montagnais, a tribe living along the Lower St. Lawrence. The language of this tribe differed from that of the Hurons, but Brébeuf knew that the time spent in acquiring it would not be lost; it could not fail to be useful some day. That first experience among the savages during the rigors of a Canadian winter would have broken the spirit of a man less hardy than he, but his "iron frame and unconquerably resolute nature" were proof against

**His first
experiences**

such bitter trials. In those long winter months his days were spent following the Indians on the chase, his nights in bark wigwams suffering from cold and hunger, breathing an atmosphere foul with the smoke of the fire-places. Add to this the continual jibes and insults showered on him by the uncouth savages for his faults in trying to speak their tongue, and we can form an idea of the life he led during his first months in New France. His success, however, was such that the following spring Charles Lalemant could write in a letter to the General of the Order: "Father de Brébeuf, a pious and prudent man, and of robust constitution, has passed a rude winter season among the savages, and has acquired an extensive knowledge of their tongue." Brébeuf had begun to show the precious talent which was later to give him such mastery over the Huron language.

The flotilla from the Huron country had reached Quebec early in 1626, the savages

**He goes to
the Hurons**

had bartered all their furs and were on the eve of their return homewards. This opportunity

could not be lost, and rather than wait another year, Brébeuf made every effort—even urging the intervention of Champlain—to assure his passage in the canoes. He had some difficulty, however; the savages complained of his weight; a frail canoe could not carry him safely hundreds of miles against the swift currents and over the dangerous rapids of the Upper Ottawa. A few gifts solved the objections of the savage

traders, and Brébeuf, accompanied by Father De Nouë and the Recollect, de la Roche de Daillon, set out over the famous Ottawa and Nipissing route to the Huron nation. He was about to begin a long and lonesome journey of suffering, and taste under another form the hardships of the previous winter. In the dark, smoky wigwams of the Montagnais he had suffered from cold and hunger and abandonment; he was now to suffer the intolerable heat of summer, the fatigues of incessant paddling, the trudging over portages, the annoyance of insects and vermin, and the sleeplessness which was the result. The Ottawa route, destined to be famous for a couple of centuries in missionary and fur-trading annals, was then in its primeval wildness. Nature left to herself had covered the banks of the Ottawa and French Rivers and Lake Nipissing with pine and maple, and the only sounds heard echoing through those thick forests were the splashing of paddles and the chattering of savages—novel scenes surely for eyes and ears fresh from the cities of Old France. The Ottawa valley has changed its face in the past two centuries, and so have the facilities for travellers through it on their way westward to the Great Lakes; in Father de Brébeuf's time conditions were primitive indeed, and the journey from Quebec to Georgian Bay was a formidable undertaking for himself and his companions. After thirty days of painful efforts the three men floated out of French River and coasted down the eastern shore

of Georgian Bay. A few wigwams, scattered here and there along the shore, gave evidences of human occupation, and soon the shouts of his tawny cohorts told him that he had reached Otouacha, the landing place of the Huron village of Toanché,¹ and the end of his journey.

The missionary's first care was to secure a cabin—or *annonchia*, as Sagard called it—built of long poles driven into the ground and then bent forward till their topmost ends met. A covering of bark thrown over this tunnel-shaped skeleton, provided a habitation into which he could retire. Father de Brébeuf had come to preach the Gospel of Christ to a race of savages who had never known the true God, and he began at once to acquire a knowledge of the

Studies the Huron tongue, the only means
language of communication with them.

His first weeks were passed in plying them with questions, writing down their answers as they sounded to his ear, and thus augmenting daily his stock of words; his evenings beside his camp-fire were spent in classifying them, in forming sentences, and in trying to discover the mechanism of the strange tongue. Nature had given Brébeuf a retentive memory and a marvellous facility for seizing the laws governing languages, gifts which he thanked God for more than once, and he made such rapid progress that in a short time he had acquired

1. On Pentang Bay. Cf. Jones' *Old Huronia*, diagr. III, p. 36; then pp. 46, 47, 59; colored sketch, p. 22b.

a tolerable knowledge of the Huron tongue. His two companions were less gifted, and after a sojourn of a year in the Huron country, both Daillon and de Nouë were recalled to Quebec.

Brébeuf was now alone in this awful Huron solitude. He began his lonely life by planting a large cross before his cabin, so that its shadow might bless him and his labors. He visited the homes of the savages, gathered them together in assemblies, explained to them the rudiments of the Christian faith, and tried to impress on them the existence of the true God, of heaven and hell, and the other great truths of religion. But the weeks and months were passing and he had not yet been able to make any impression on minds and hearts hardened by centuries of superstition. He struggled on patiently during the winters of 1627-1628 and 1628-1629, hoping that the hour of grace would soon strike, consoling himself meanwhile with the baptism of a few children in danger of death. More than once, however, during the second year (1628) he had the satisfaction of seeing sick and infirm adults yielding to his burning zeal, and he had hopes even of forming the nucleus of a congregation among the converts of Toanché and its neighborhood, when an order came from his superior summoning him back to civilization.

Brébeuf reached Quebec in July, 1629, and found the little French colony in the grip of famine. Vessels carrying provisions from the

motherland had either foundered at sea or had been seized by English corsairs in the Gulf. The future looked dark; France and England were on the verge of war; during the previous year an expedition under Admiral Kerkt had

He is sent

back to France

come to seize Quebec; but the haughty reception given him by Champlain had put off the inevitable for a time. Kerkt, however, determined to take possession of the colony, returned in 1629. Hunger and want obliged Champlain to surrender, and together with the Jesuits, Recollects and a number of the French colonists, he was taken back to Europe. This turn of events wrecked many a bright hope in the heart of Brébeuf. Even the sight of his beloved France, after an absence of four years, could not reconcile him to the loss of his Huron mission. He knew not what the future had in store for the colony on the St. Lawrence, but he knew that the souls of thousands of pagan Hurons were awaiting salvation on Georgian Bay, and he resolved to return thither as soon as the occasion should present itself.

Three years were to elapse before this resolve could be carried out. However, they were years of solid spiritual profit for this apostolic man. While at Rouen, in 1630, he pro-

He takes his

final vows

nounced his final vows as a Jesuit, thereby binding himself irrevocably to the service of His Divine Master. "A few days before," he wrote, "I felt a strong desire to suffer something for

Jesus Christ; and I said: 'Lord, make me a man according to Thine own Heart. Let me know Thy holy will. Let nothing separate me from Thy love, neither nakedness, nor the sword, nor death itself. Thou hast made me a member of Thy Society and an apostle in Canada, not it is true by the gift of tongues but by a facility in learning them.' " These noble sentiments had not lost their luster in his heart when a year later he signed with his blood the following solemn offering of himself:

Lord Jesus, my Redeemer, Thou hast saved me with Thy Blood and precious Death. In return for this favor, I promise to serve Thee all my life in Thy Society of Jesus, and never to serve anyone but Thee. I sign this promise with my own blood, ready to sacrifice it all as willingly as I do this drop.

JOHN DE BRÉBEUF, S. J.

God did not forget this generous promise, but eighteen years had to pass before the cruel Iroquois gave him the opportunity to redeem it. Meanwhile he was waiting patiently for the moment to return to his Hurons. Negotiations

He returns to Canada for the transfer of Canada back to France were being pushed vigorously, and resulted in a treaty which was signed at St. Germain-en-Laye, March 29, 1532. Canada became again a French colony, and the way was open to resume mission work among the native tribes.

Two Jesuits, Paul Le Jeune and Anne de Nouë, were sent at once to Canada, while Brébeuf, notwithstanding his ardent supplications, had to wait another year. He sailed from Dieppe, March 23, 1633, his ship casting anchor before Quebec two months later. He had hardly set foot on Canadian soil when he started for the Huron country, but difficulties again barred his way. The Algonquins of Allumette Island, through whose country the Hurons had to pass on their way up and down, had grown jealous of the trade relations which had sprung up between the latter and the French, and they feared the influence of the missionaries. They threatened violence to the Black-gowns if they persevered in their intention of making the journey; and yet wrote Le Jeune, "I never saw more resolute men than Brébeuf and his companions when told that they might lose their lives on the way."

Prudence, however, forbade risking the enmity of the Algonquins and possibly closing indefinitely the route to the Huron country, and Brébeuf returned to Quebec, as he had done in 1625, to await another year. He bowed his head to the will of God and resolved to find work near home. "Father Brébeuf will not be idle," Le Jeune wrote to the General of the Jesuits; "he will teach the others the Huron language." His presence at Quebec left Le Jeune free to spend a winter among the Montagnais and to give us the admirable record of his adventures in the *Relation* of 1633.

The summer of 1634 found Brébeuf at Three Rivers seeking anew the opportunity to embark for Huronia. The objections put forward the previous year were again resorted to, but a few presents smoothed the negotiation, and the zealous missionary found a place in a canoe.

**Is again with
the Hurons**

"Never did I witness a start," he wrote, "about which there was so much quibbling and opposition, all, I believe, being the tactics of the enemy of man's salvation. It was by a providential chance that we managed to get away, and by the power of glorious St. Joseph, in whose honor God inspired me in my despair to offer twenty Masses." While on his way westward with Fathers Daniel and Davost, he wrote to Le Jeune, "We are going by short stages, and we are quite well. We paddle all day because our savages are sick. What ought we not to do for God and for souls redeemed by the blood of His Son?... Your Reverence will excuse this writing, order and all; we start early in the morning, lie down so late and paddle so continually, that we hardly have time for our prayers. Indeed I have been obliged to finish this letter by the light of the fire." ¹

The three missionaries travelling in separate canoes had been absent a few days when news reached Quebec—news which could not be verified—that Brébeuf was suffering greatly and that Daniel had died of starvation. Le Jeune

1. *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. vii, pp. 219, 311.

exclaimed when he heard it, "If Father Brébeuf should die, the little we knew of the Huron tongue will be lost, and then we shall have to begin over again, thus retarding the fruits that we wish to gather on this mission." ¹ Happily the news turned out to be false, and on the feast of Our Lady of the Snows, August 5, 1634, after thirty days' travel, Brébeuf landed alone at the spot where he had first set foot on Huron territory, eight years before. The fickle savages had promised to lead him to their villages, but they cruelly abandoned him. Brébeuf tells us that he knelt down and invoked the Guar-

**Experiences
of savage
fickleness**

dian Angels of the country to guide him safely. Confident of their help, he pushed on alone over a trail now overgrown and

deserted, and finally he was able to contemplate, with tenderness and emotion, the spot where he had lived and celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass from 1626 to 1629.

But Toanché had disappeared, and after a short stay at Teandeouiata, awaiting the arrival of Daniel and Davost, he and his two companions settled at Ihonatiria ² on the north shore of the Peninsula. Brébeuf's previous knowledge of the Huron tongue proved a valuable asset

1. *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. vii, p. 223.

2. Father Jones places Ihonatiria in the immediate neighborhood of Todd's Point, lot 6, concession xx, xxi, Tiny township. (For his proofs, cf. *Old Huronia*, pp. 28-31).

now; he began to visit the cabins, instructing adults and baptizing children. He gathered the savages together, and then, clothed in surplice and biretta—to give majesty to his appearance, he remarked—he taught them the Sign of the Cross, the Commandments of God, and prayers in their own tongue. On Sundays he assembled them in his cabin to hear Mass and to answer questions in the catechism. Little presents given to the children enkindled in them so great a desire to learn that, the *Relations* inform us, there was not one in Ihonatiria who did not wish to be taught; and as they were all fairly intelligent, they made quite rapid progress. The fruits were being gathered in slowly. “They

**Success in
the ministry**

would be greater,” Father de Brébeuf asserted,” if I could only leave this village and visit others.” Accordingly he made flying visits to the Tobacco nation and also to Teanaostaiaë,¹ the largest settlement of the Cord clan. He summed up the results in a letter dated June 16, 1636, claiming eighty baptisms in 1635, whilst he had only fourteen the year before.

The missionaries were growing more numerous, and the moment was favorable for greater apostolic activity. The Huron flotilla brought up a couple of Jesuits every year, who as soon

1. This village, known as St. Joseph II, was situated on the Flanagan farm, west half of lot 7, concession iv, Medonte township. A half-fused stand of a brass candlestick or crucifix was found there some years ago. (Cf. Jones' *Old Huronia*, p. 19, and fig. 1, plate p. 21.)

as they secured a smattering of the language, were able to instruct and baptize in many of the hamlets with which the country was dotted. Ossossanē the largest village of the Bear clan, situated on Nottawasaga Bay, became a residence. ¹

In 1637, a strange pestilence visited the Huron nation and carried hundreds of savages to the grave. The sorcerers, whose influence among their people was supreme and who feared a loss of prestige, laid the blame of this scourge on the Black-gowns. Every motive was seized upon to accuse them, and the lives of isolation and hardship which those devoted men underwent were to have an aftermath in persecution. Brébeuf was declared to be a dangerous sorcerer, in fact the most dangerous

Persecuted in the country, and he was
by the Huron held responsible for the calam-
savages ities that were weighing heavily
on the tribe. Not merely the death of their fellow-savages, but the absence of rain, the failure of crops and lack of success on the chase, were laid at his door by the malcontents, who more than one threatened to cleave his head with a tomahawk. Affairs had assumed so serious a turn in the autumn of 1637,

1. Known as La Rochelle by the French fur traders, and by the missionaries as the residence of the Immaculate Conception. The four successive sites of Ossossanē all lay in the neighborhood of Varwood Point on Nottawasaga Bay. (Cf. Jones' *Old Huronia*, p. 27, and colored sketch, p. 22a.)

and Brébeuf was so convinced that his hour had come, that he wrote to his superior in Quebec a farewell letter, revealing the greatest resignation to whatever fate God had in store for him. Speaking for himself and his six companions, "We are, perhaps," he wrote, "on the point of shedding our blood and of sacrificing our lives in the service of our good Master Jesus Christ. It seems that His goodness consents

Writes a farewell letter to accept this sacrifice from me in expiation of my great and innumerable sins, and to crown, even now, the service already rendered.....

All our Fathers here await the outcome with great peace of mind..... We are all sorry that these poor barbarians are, through their own malice, closing their doors to the Gospel and to grace. Whatever treatment they give us we shall try by the help of our Lord to endure patiently for His service. It is now that we consider ourselves truly as members of His Society. If it be His will that we should die, oh fortunate are we! If He wills to reserve us for other labors may He be blessed! If you hear that God has crowned our poor work, or rather our desires, bless Him; for it is for Him that we desire to live and die, and it is He who gives us the grace therefor." ¹

Father de Brébeuf was spokesman for his brethren, and these lines coming from his pen, paint in unmistakable terms the sentiments

1. *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. xv, p, 61.

which animated the heroic missionary. Wishing to show the Hurons his utter contempt for his own safety and the little value he placed on this miserable life, he invited them to what the savages called a Farewell Feast, and which those condemned to torture were accustomed to provide. Many accepted the invitation and listened in mournful silence while the holy man told them that death had no terrors for him, that it meant eternal life for himself and his brethren; but he warned the Hurons of the crime they were about to commit. Meanwhile the days slipped away quietly, without any act of violence. A complete change had taken place in the hearts of the wretched Hurons, a change that Father de Brébeuf attributed to the intercession

Happy results of St. Joseph in whose honor the missionaries had vowed to say
of a vow Mass for nine consecutive days.

The clouds had temporarily passed away, and the Jesuits began to resume their visits to the villages, helping the sick and infirm and baptizing little children in danger of death.

The arrival of Jerome Lalemant, in the summer of 1638, to replace Brébeuf as superior of the Huron missions, gave the latter more freedom to go from village to village. Ihonatiria had been abandoned; Ossossanē had become the chief residence of the Bear clan. A residence was also established at Teanaostaiaë. On these two centers of population depended many minor villages, and with the help of new recruits a crusade was started throughout the

length and breath of Huronia. Numerous striking conversions are recorded in the *Relations*, showing that sorcery and native superstition were losing their hold on the tribe, and

The central residence that an era of further expansion would have ensued had not the Iroquois begun their depredations.

Those inveterate enemies of the Hurons had become active and irritating. Their presence was a menace both to the missionaries and their neophytes, and it was decided to build a permanent residence and fortify it strongly enough to resist the attacks of those cunning foes of both French and Hurons. The result of this decision was Fort Ste Marie on the Wye river, built in 1639, a "home of peace" which, while it would protect the missionaries from their enemies, would also be a shelter where they could retire occasionally and recuperate their physical and spiritual strength.¹

The plans of the missionaries were being carried out harmoniously; the work of catechising the Hurons was going on vigorously, when a new scourge swept down on that unfortunate race. Small-pox appeared and began to ravage Ossossanë, Teanaostaiaë and the dependent villages. As usual the Black-gowns were held responsible for the new pestilence, and Brébeuf, who was looked on as the chief of the French

1. This venerable spot is well known. The foundations may still be seen at Old Fort on the Grand Trunk Railway, three miles from Midland, Ont.

sorcerers, had the lion's share of savage resentment. Acts of violence were attempted against him, stones were flung at him, blows were showered upon him, and even a hatchet was raised one day to strike him, but the *Relation* of 1640 tells us that conformably to the example of his Divine Master, he returned only good for evil.

In 1641, accompanied by Father Chaumonot, **He visits the Neutrals** he paid a visit to the Neutral nation, situated along the north shore of Lake Erie. He spent the winter of 1640-1641 among those savages and returned the following spring with a broken shoulder-blade. Owing to the absence of surgical aid in the mission and the closing of the Ottawa route by the Iroquois, the unhappy man had to bear patiently for several months the torture occasioned by this accident. Later in the summer he was sent down to Quebec for treatment, and incidentally to give his superior the benefit of his experiences among the Hurons. He was kept three years away from his beloved mission on Georgian Bay, building up his shattered health and instructing certain young seminarists at Sillery and Quebec. He returned to the Huron country only in 1644.

A great change had taken place in Huronia in those three years. The incursions of the Iroquois had become more frequent. Small detachments were frequently encountered, and everywhere they left behind them a trail of blood. The terrified Hurons palisaded their

villages, and took precautions, as best they could, against those onslaughts. As if they had a presentiment of their coming doom and wishing to meet it fully prepared, they flocked around the Fathers in greater numbers than ever to hear the words of life. Amid constant perils Brébeuf and his fellow-missionaries went from village to village, spending themselves in this arduous work. The harvest was growing; hundreds were clamoring for baptism. But amid their consolations the Jesuits saw that the clouds were lowering; disaster was following disaster; and all, even the missionaries themselves, were at a loss to say what the future would bring forth. They were soon to learn. On July, 4th, 1648, the Iroquois swepted down on Teanaostaiaë, a village of four hundred families, massacred or made prisoners of seven hundred men, women, and children, ransacked the village, set fire to the church, riddled Father Daniel's body with bullets, and then threw it into the flames. This crime warned both the missionaries and their people what was in store for them in the near future at the hands of the brutal Iroquois.

There were now eighteen Jesuits actively engaged among the Hurons, one of these being Gabriel Lalemant, who had arrived only in September, 1648. He had been sent to live with Father de Brébeuf at St. Ignace, a small village which had been removed the previous winter to

a strongly fortified site¹ about three miles nearer Fort Ste Marie. It was there in March, 1649, that the supreme sacrifice, so long sought for, awaited Brébeuf and his companion. Both missionaries happened to be the neighboring village of St. Louis², three miles away, instructing the neophytes, when at early dawn of March 16, fully a thousand Iroquois stealthily approached St. Ignace. They flung themselves on the unsuspecting and unprepared Hurons, murdering and making prisoners of them all. Only three escaped and hurried to St. Louis to warn Father de Brébeuf and the people, but at their heels rushed the Iroquois,

Brébeuf is a and another massacre took
prisoner place at that village. Although
the two Jesuits were urged repeatedly to flee and save themselves, they refused to do so. They were then seized, bound and brought back to St. Ignace, where their inhuman captors had already made preparations for their torture and death.

Christopher Regnaut, the domestic who brought the charred bodies to Fort Ste Marie, a few hours after the tragedy, has left us a thrill-

1. Identified by Father Jones, in 1903, on the Campbell farm, east half of lot 4, concession vii, Tay township. The spot is now known as Martyr's Hill, about a mile from C. P. R. station of the same name. This is the site of the shrine built in honor of the Huron victims of the Iroquois. (Cf. Jones' *Old Huronia*, p. 121 et sqq.)

2. Situated on the Newton farm, west half of lot 11, concession vi, of Tay township. Ash-beds, kitchen refuse, potsherds, etc., have been found there in abundance.

ling account gathered from the lips of the Huron Christians, of the barbarous treatment the two missionaries received ¹. "They (the Iroquois) took them both and stripped them entirely naked and fastened lack to a post. They tied both their hands together. They tore the nails from their fingers. They beat them with a shower of blows with sticks on their shoulders, loins, legs and face, no part of their body being exempt from this torment. Although Father de Brébeuf was overwhelmed by the weight of these blows, the holy man did cease to speak of God and to encourage his fellow-captives to suffer well that they might die well..... Whilst he was thus encouraging these good people, a wretched Huron renegade, who had remained a captive

**He endures
cruel tortures** with the Iroquois, and whom Father de Brébeuf had formerly instructed and baptized, hearing him speak of Paradise and holy baptism, was irritated and said to him 'Echon (Father Brébeuf's Huron name) 'thou sayest that baptism and the sufferings of this life lead straight to Paradise; thou shalt go thither soon, for I am about to baptize thee and make thee suffer well, in order that thou mayest go sooner to thy Paradise'. The barbarian having said this, took a kettle full of boiling water which he poured over his head three different times in derision of holy baptism. And each time that he

1. From a MS. obtained by Mr. Brymner, in Paris, in 1883, and now preserved in the Canadian Archives, Ottawa.

baptized him in this manner the barbarian said to him, with bitter sarcasm. 'Go to Heaven, for thou art well baptized'. After that they made him suffer several other torments. The first was to heat hatchets red-hot and apply them to the loins and under the armpits. They made a collar of these red-hot hatchets and put it on the neck of the good Father. Here is the way I have seen the collar made for other prisoners: they heat six hatchets red-hot, take a stout withe, draw the two ends together, and then put it round the neck of the sufferer. I have seen no torment which moved me more to compassion than this; for you see a man, bound naked to a post, who, having this collar on his neck, knows not what posture to take. If he lean forward, the hatchets on the shoulder weigh more heavily on him; if he lean back, those on his breast make him suffer the same torment; if he keep erect, without leaning to one side or another, the burning axes, applied equally to both sides, give him a double torture. After that they put on him a belt full of pitch and resin, and set fire to it; this roasted his whole body. During all these torments Father de Brébeuf stood like a rock, insensible to fire and flame, which astonished all the blood-thirsty executioners who tormented him. His zeal was so great that he preached continually to those infidels to try to convert them. His tormenters were enraged against him for constantly speaking to them of God and of their conversion. To prevent him from

speaking again of these things, they cut out his tongue and cut off his upper and lower lips. After that they set themselves to stripping the flesh from his legs, thighs and arms, to the very bone, and put it to roast before his eyes, in order to eat it. Whilst they were tormenting him in this manner, the wretches derided him, saying, 'Thou see well that we treat thee as a friend, since we shall be the cause of thy eternal happiness. Thank us, then, for these good offices which we render thee, for the more thou shalt have suffered the more will thy God reward thee.' The monsters seeing that the Father began

to grow weak, made him sit
The supreme down on the ground, and one
sacrifice of them, taking a knife, cut
 off the skin from his skull.

Another of the barbarians seeing that he would soon die, made an opening in the upper part of his chest, tore out his heart, roasted and ate it. Others came to drink his blood still warm, which they did with both hands, saying that Father de Brébeuf had been very brave to endure all the pain they had caused him, and that in drinking his blood they would become brave like him."

After several hours of these inhuman tortures, the holy apostle of the Hurons expired at four in the afternoon, March 16, 1649.¹ He was fifty-six years of age, sixteen of which he had spent in the Canadian missions. His

1. *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit. vol. xxxiv, p. 147.

long and painful ministry was at last ended; nothing now remained but the charred and

Death and burial

blackened bones and flesh of the heroic missionary. Several

Frenchmen were sent from Fort

Ste Marie on the following morning to bring back the bodies and give them Christian burial.

They found at St. Ignace a spectacle of horror, or rather, as Ragueneau wrote, "the relics of that love of God which alone triumphs in the death of martyrs." "I would gladly call them by that glorious name," he asserted in the *Relation* of 1640, "if I were allow to do so, not merely because for the love and for the salvation

Ragueneau's testimony

of their neighbor they voluntarily exposed themselves to death and to a cruel death if

ever there was one in the world—but much rather would I call them martyrs because... hatred for the faith and contempt for the name of God were among the most powerful incentives which influenced the minds of the barbarians to practise upon them as many cruelties as ever the rage of tyrants obliged martyrs to endure" ¹ "Not one of us could ever prevail upon himself to pray to God for them, as if they had had any need of it, but our minds were at once directed towards Heaven where we have no doubt their souls are." ²

In 1650, when the Huron mission was aban-

1. *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. xxxiv, p. 139.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

doned forever, the bones of Fathers de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lalemant were raised from the grave at Fort Ste Marie, and **Relics brought to Quebec** brought to Quebec where they were held in high veneration.

A rich silver reliquary was sent to Quebec—probably by the Brébeuf family—to receive the skull of the venerable victim of the Iroquois. Other portions of his relics were distributed among the Canadian communities; others were sent to France. Few of these survived the depredations of the French Revolution, but there is still a relic of Brébeuf honorably treasured in the Jesuit college at Canterbury, in England.

And yet, it is well to say that perhaps the most precious relic that has come down to us of this venerable servant of God is the story of his life and labors which has been preserved in the *Jesuit Relations*. This monumental record of the heroism of the early Canadian missionaries has always excited the admiration of historians. Not all of them, however,—notably Parkman—have done complete justice to the lofty motives which could inspire a man like Brébeuf to bury himself in the forests along Georgian Bay and finally sacrifice his life—all he had to sacrifice—for the conversion of the aborigines of New France. Others, better qualified to judge, have been fairer to his memory, when they credit the grace of God with his victories and make him say with St. Paul, “I can do all in Him who strengtheneth

me." "His death," wrote Paul Ragueneau, his superior, "has crowned his life, and perseverance has been the seal of his holiness... He died while preaching and exercising truly apostolic offices,—and by a death which the first Apostle of the Hurons deserved." ¹

John de Brébeuf was looked on as a martyr from time of his heroic death, and he would have been proclaimed a martyr even from that moment had his contemporaries dared to forestall the infallible decision of the Church. The veneration in which he was held urged the Archbishop of Rouen, three years later, to secure authenticated evidence of the heroicity of his virtues. A precious MS dated 1652, the contents of which are attested under oath by Father Ragueneau, is still extant to show that the *Relations* did not exaggerate "his gentleness which won all hearts, his courage truly generous in enterprises, his long suffering in awaiting the moments of God, his patience in enduring everything, his zeal in undertaking everything he saw was for the glory of God." ²

Nor has the veneration given from the earliest years to this victim of Iroquois cruelty yielded to the dissolving influences of time. Over two centuries and a half have elapsed since the dim tragedy was enacted on Martyrs' Hill, Simcoe County, Ontario, and the name of John de Brébeuf is still a household word in every

1. *Jesuit Relations*, Clev. edit., vol. xxxiv, p. 195.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

home in America. The hope of seeing him and his companions some day on the altar urged the Canadian Bishops assembled in council at Quebec, in 1886, to petition the Holy See to permit the Cause of their Beatification to be introduced. Already much progress has been made in this necessarily slow work. Meanwhile the instances of the intercessory power of John de Brébeuf and his companions, manifested in favor of the sick and infirm, are being carefully gathered and sifted. Let us hope that they will become sufficiently evident to justify the Holy See in conferring on those heroic Canadian missionaries the honors of the Beatified.



